

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, D.C — Yesterday, the government of China commemorated the 60th anniversary of the coming to power of the Communist Party with much fanfare. But not all of China is celebrating, with dissidents over the past several days lamenting the government's repression of religious freedom; ethnic autonomy; and the freedoms of speech, association, assembly, and legal representation.

To mark this sobering anniversary, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) announced today that it has named China as one of its top priorities for the next several months, and, as such, the country will be the subject of intensified attention and activity. USCIRF urges the Obama Administration to listen carefully to China's dissidents, rights activists, and religious believers and pursue policies that demonstrate unwavering support for those who are in prison, have disappeared, or who are under pressure in China for seeking greater government accountability, the rule of law, religious freedom, and other human rights.

For many in China, this is an anniversary marking repression, particularly for tens of millions of Christians, Tibetans, Uighurs, Falun Gong practitioners, human rights lawyers, and other rights activists. USCIRF welcomes President Obama's eloquent statements about why religious freedom is an American interest rooted in our nation's history, but urges him to speak about why religious freedom is in China's interest, rooted in international human rights treaties and conventions. USCIRF urges the President to do this during a promised visit to China next month.

Though religious practice has greatly expanded in China over the past decade, religious freedom abuses continue, including arrests, detentions, mistreatment, fines, confiscation of property, and other restrictions. Groups facing the most severe persecution include Tibetan Buddhists; Uighur Muslims; unregistered Protestants and Catholics; folk religionists and spiritual movements such as the Falun Gong; and human rights lawyers who seek to protect vulnerable religious communities. Among Tibetan Buddhists and Uighur Muslims, severe religious freedom restrictions continue to be a source of deep resentment. USCIRF's Annual Report chapter on China, and recent statements regarding Tibetan Buddhism and Uighur Muslims, can be found at www.uscifr.gov.

"Where is Gao Zhiseng? Where is Bishop Su Zhimin? Where is Gendun Choekyi Nyima? How many more Tibetans, Uighurs, Christians, Falun Gong practitioners, and North Korean

refugees need to be detained, harassed, and tortured in China in the name of maintaining stability and law? The Obama Administration should be asking these questions,” said Leonard Leo, USCIRF Chair. “The international community cannot soft-pedal persecution in China, and must recognize that human rights protection is an important component of continued economic progress. Administration policies should be detailing the tangible diplomatic, political, social, and economic benefits China can gain by fully protecting and promoting religious freedom and related human rights. At the same time, the Administration should be signaling to Beijing that continued repression and human rights abuses will hinder the growth and flexibility of U.S.-China relations.”

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF’s principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

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